

IVF Answers

How long does an egg retrieval take?

Egg retrieval is a fairly rapid procedure. Obviously the length of the procedure depends on how many follicles are present. Also the accessibility of the ovaries will determine how long the procedure will take. Accessibility means how easy is it to reach the ovaries with the ultrasound probe, whether they have a tendency to move away from the probe and so on. The typical egg retrieval will take from 20-30 minutes.

Is the egg retrieval painful?

We do our egg retrievals under conscious sedation so the patient is in a "twilight" like state for the procedure. We use medications, which sedate the patient so she is "sleepy" however; she is not anesthetized so that breathing tubes are not necessary. The beauty of this approach is that the patient feels very little, usually remembers nothing, and has few if any of the typical side effects of anesthesia such as nausea and vomiting.

Will the egg retrieval damage my ovaries?

The data we have available tells us that it does not. There have been many women who have undergone multiple egg retrievals. The fact that they have responded to stimulation on subsequent occasions and gotten eggs and pregnancies on these occasions implies that the ovaries are OK after egg retrieval. There have been some limited studies looking at the appearance of the ovaries in women who have had egg retrievals and subsequent laparoscopic surgery. In those patients, the findings were normal. Of course we simply have no data as to long-term outcomes because IVF and egg retrievals have only been done since 1978, however our opinion, and that of the medical community, is that egg retrieval is a safe procedure where the benefits outweigh the risks.

Is bleeding expected after the egg retrieval?

Vaginal bleeding is not uncommon after egg retrieval. Usually this bleeding is from the needle puncture sites in the vaginal wall. It is usually minor and similar to a period or less. The bleeding experienced is analogous to the bleeding that will take place from an IV or from the arm after blood has been drawn. Unfortunately there is no way to put Band-Aids on the vaginal puncture sites!

Is it normal to retrieve an egg from every follicle?

Not necessarily. Although we will usually get an egg from most mature sized follicles, most women will have a mixed group of follicles after ovulation induction. Some of those follicles will have immature eggs or post mature eggs, which may not be identifiable so they will seem to have been "empty" follicles.

Is the embryo transfer painful?

The embryo transfer does not require any anesthesia. It is performed using a speculum (like a Pap smear) and is very similar in technique to an intrauterine insemination (IUI). Usually the woman feels only the speculum and nothing else.

Is bed rest recommended after the embryo transfer?

It is really not necessary from the conception point of view. In nature, the embryo floats freely in the endometrial cavity for a number of days before implantation and it will do the same in an IVF cycle. We do recommend that our patients take it easy following transfer, but routine daily activities are certainly reasonable. If there is an increased risk of Ovarian Hyperstimulation, we will recommend prophylactic bedrest.

What is the average number of embryos transferred?

We make this decision based on the patient's age and desires. As a general rule we'll transfer up to 2 embryos in women under 38 and up to 3 embryos in those over 38. Alternatively, in situations where embryo quality is spectacular, some couples prefer to transfer just 1 embryo.

Can anything be done to improve embryo quality?

Ultimately the answer is no. If an embryo is of poor quality because it is genetically abnormal, there is nothing that can be done to salvage it.

What is done with any "left-over" embryos?

Embryos that are not transferred in the retrieval cycle are maintained in culture for an additional 2-3 days. Those embryos that progress to the blastocyst stage can then be cryopreserved, if that is the couple's wish. No embryos are utilized for research in our facility.

How soon after IVF can a pregnancy test be performed?

Since hCG is used to finalize egg maturation and to schedule egg retrieval, a pregnancy test (which is a measurement of hCG hormone in the urine or blood) will be positive for a number of days following egg retrieval. Some women will metabolize the hormone quickly and it will be out of the blood stream in a couple of days, while others may take up to 10 days to do so. Simultaneously, a pregnancy starts secreting hCG in measurable amounts in the blood approximately 1-2 days before the expected period. Keeping these two issues in mind, then, we recommend that a pregnancy test be performed 12 days after the egg retrieval.

Is there an increased risk of birth defects related to IVF?

This issue has been looked at extensively. The simple answer is that there is no increased risk of birth defects after IVF. Human beings have an overall rate of birth defects of approximately 2% at birth. The rate has been shown to be the same for IVF pregnancies. There is some recent data showing that there may be a minimal increase in this rate among those pregnancies established by means of IVF and ICSI. The increase was found to be in the 1% range.

Are there limitations on the number of IVF tries per couple?

We find that most couples will get pregnant within 3 tries. Occasionally, there may be a reason to do a fourth attempt but that is not common. More than this would really require extenuating circumstances such as a miscarriage due to a non-recurring reason, for example.